

Institution: Newcastle University
Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Benchmarking the regional contribution of universities: Enabling effective engagement by higher education institutions
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>A significant body of research at Newcastle University, led by Professor Charles, has played a key role both in articulating the importance of universities to regional development and in demonstrating how this may be enacted. In 2002, Charles and colleagues developed a benchmarking tool for regional engagement that enabled universities to assess the effectiveness of their engagement. This tool has been extensively used during the current impact period, most recently in 2010-11 as part of an international review of universities across 20 countries undertaken by the Pascal Observatory. The significance of the impact lies in the tool enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to respond directly to the new policy imperative of engagement beyond academia. The reach of the impact is evidenced by the use of the benchmarking tool in the UK and internationally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Understanding the contribution of HEIs to regions and society Academics at Newcastle, led by Professor Charles (at Newcastle 1985-2009, Visiting Professor 2009-date), have since 1990 been at the forefront of research that has sought to understand and articulate the contribution of HEIs to regional economies and societies (1-2). Their research generated a deeper recognition of how such potential could be realised. It responded to a growing expectation that HEIs should contribute to the economic and social development of the regions in which they are based (e.g. Grants 3 and 4). Charles <i>et al.</i> identified through their research a growing focus on local and regional communities in university mission statements – a focus often reflected in new institutional arrangements both within universities and between universities and other regional bodies. However, initiatives were fragmented and there were few mechanisms by which to monitor and measure their effectiveness.</p> <p>Expanding the use of benchmarking in higher education Benchmarking is a way to evaluate or measure the performance of an organisation against an agreed standard. Benchmarking is well-established as part of the process of continuous improvement for commercial companies, and its application has expanded into public services (3). The approach is an important management tool because it allows the combination of different forms of measurement and models of performance. It can use qualitative as well as quantitative indicators, process measures, and both leading and lagging indicators. This allows it to identify if good practices are being adopted without having to wait to measure their outcomes.</p> <p>Charles and colleagues at Newcastle pioneered the use of benchmarking as a means of assessing and developing the regional contribution of HEIs. Building on a previous project (Grant 1), in 2000 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Universities UK commissioned Charles to provide a framework for HEIs (Grant 2). The purpose of the research was to enable HEIs to map the extent of their regional engagement and assess whether and how that engagement might be extended (3-5). Through this research the Newcastle team developed a benchmarking tool that enabled HEIs to assess their regional contribution as part of a best practice approach (3-5).</p> <p>Benchmarking in international contexts Between 2007 and 2012, Charles was involved in a thematic review undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to support the contribution of HEIs to regional development. This embraced 29 regions across 19 countries. The work was based on regional self-evaluations, international peer reviews and case studies. Charles led the</p>

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review of the Sunshine-Fraser Coast, Australia, and was part of the team reviewing Victoria, Australia and the Basque Country. Reports were published by the OECD (6).

The PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement (PURE) project was formed in 2008 by a number of regions who had participated in the OECD work. Its purpose was to carry on the research and to promote greater inter-regional collaboration through the development of action plans. As part of the project run by the PASCAL International Observatory (Grant 5), Charles and his Newcastle colleagues further developed the tool initially devised through the work for HEFCE. The new tools included one for university benchmarking and one for regional benchmarking. They were configured to take account of a more international context, and contained new questions that probed universities' own policies for engagement.

3. References to the research

1. Charles, D. (2006). 'Universities as key knowledge infrastructures in regional innovation systems'. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 19(1), 117-130. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13511610600608013>.
2. Charles, D. (2003). 'Universities and territorial development: Reshaping the regional role of UK universities'. *Local Economy*, 18(1), 7-20. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0269094032000073780> (ABS list 2010 2*).
3. Charles, D., Benneworth, P. (2002). 'Evaluating the regional contribution of an HEI: A benchmarking approach'. HEFCE, Bristol. (Available on request).
4. Charles, D., Benneworth, P. (2001). 'The regional mission: The regional contribution of higher education: National Report'. Universities UK/HEFCE, London (published with nine regional reports). (Available on request).
5. Charles, D., Wilson, B. (2012). 'Managing regional engagement: The role of benchmarking'. In Pinheiro, R., Benneworth, P., Jones, G. (eds.) *Universities and Regional Development: A Critical Assessment of Tensions and Contradictions*, Routledge, pp. 219-237. (Available on request).
6. OECD (2005-2012). *Higher Education in Regional and City Development*. 'The Sunshine-Fraser Coast case study report (Australia)' and 'Higher education and regional development: The State of Victoria, Australia'. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/highereducationinregionalandcitydevelopment.htm> (accessed 24/09/13).

Table of relevant grants

	Principal Investigator(s)	Grant Title	Sponsor	Period of Grant	Value to Newcastle
1.	David Charles / John Goddard	Regional profiles of higher education	HEFCE	Nov 1999 – Oct 2000	£75,000
2.	David Charles	The regional contribution of higher education	HEFCE and Universities UK	2000	£120,000
3.	David Charles	Survey of UK higher education interaction with business	HEFCE	Jan 2001 – June 2001	£27,500
4.	David Charles	Contribution of higher education to Northern Ireland	Department for Employment and Learning	Jan 2002 – April 2002	£10,100
5.	David Charles	Development of a university regional engagement benchmarking tool for the PASCAL project on universities and regional engagement (PURE)	PASCAL Network	2008-2009	£9,000

4. Details of the impact

Understanding the contribution of HEIs to regions

PURE had as its focus the impact of HE partnerships on regional development. It aimed to set realistic tasks and targets for HE partnership-based regional development. The project used a consultative and developmental approach to help HEIs implement change. Within each region, a review was undertaken of university engagement through partnerships with other regional bodies. These reviews specifically used the regional and university benchmarking tools developed by Charles (IMP1). The tools are also publically available on the PASCAL website for others to use.

Using the assessment tools – PURE and beyond

Sixteen regions were engaged in a two-year study from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2010, with a second cohort starting in 2011 taking the total number of participating regions to 19. The regions accessed the benchmarking materials in a variety of ways. In Puglia, for example, *“benchmarking was used and universities, notably the ‘naturally conservative’ University of Bari, used the tool and found it valuable. It was experienced as almost a ‘road to Damascus’ experience” (IMP2p3)*. Further selected examples are provided as follows.

Participants from Flanders reported that the benchmarking exercise *“brought together the vast array of disparate information about third mission activities organised within the Flemish institutions. For the first time, a report was made on these activities and most HEI actors involved concluded that they were pleasantly surprised by seeing how many third mission activities already exist....The booklet containing the good practices was disseminated within a lot of organisations and opened new insights on possible cooperation” (IMP3p2)*.

In the Gabarone region, both the university and city region participants commented that their practice was impacted upon: *“access to the PURE benchmarking tools was a significant lever in developing engagement activities...the significance of the tool was that it provided an opportunity for joint adaptation and development of measures both to recognise and evaluate engagement activities” (IMP4p2-3)*. They also commented that *“the list of substantive aspects of regional development provided within the tool was a direct support to the task of choosing areas of activity thrown up by the workshops as possibilities” (IMP4p3)*.

Benchmarking was initially applied in the Melbourne region during PURE (IMP5), and *“a significant achievement was creating a streamlined means of working and systematically using benchmarking by both universities and region” (IMP6p3)*. This took place to the extent that *“Melbourne is now an internationally recognised leader”* in the use of these techniques (IMP6p3). In addition, *“the region has used the PURE HEI and draft region benchmarking tools to take stock, and, from a basis of knowledge, monitor and enhance progress in region-HEI partnership. It will benefit both parties to repeat this” (IMP6p6)*. The report also recommended that the work be sustained into the future.

A specific example of the continued use of this work is that the benchmarking tool has now been taken up by Victoria University in Melbourne as part of their strategic review of engagement (begun in 2013). Having undertaken a detailed review of the options available to them, the Senior Policy Advisor at Victoria University commented that the tool developed at Newcastle is most appropriate for this task for the following reasons: *“it is appropriate to a number of the characteristics for benchmarking at Victoria University; detailed information on the tool is readily available; contact can be readily made with others who have used the tool locally, as well as with David Charles; and it uses a methodology which is regarded as useful for Victoria University, particularly with the recent development of the Colleges” (IMP7)*.

Implementing the Third Mission of Universities in Africa (ITMUA)

This project also emerged from existing partnership activities, including PURE (IMP8). Both Gabarone and Lesotho (PURE participants) developed their work through this project. The benchmarking tools developed for PURE were used to support the achievement of the project's goal to investigate the role of higher education in support of regional and sustainable development (IMP8). Lesotho is reported to have had sustainable development, culture and community

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development as its foci for benchmarking, the use of which revealed that individuals within the university were responsible for leading most community service activity (**IMP9p2**).

The Project Leader of ITMUA published an article which described the use of the tools to create a “baseline against which to assess the nature or extent of community service activity being undertaken” (**IMP10p90**). This enabled the project to understand the current level of activity, informing the planning of new activity as appropriate. Specifically, using the tools within a participating university revealed that members of staff were interested in working in a cross-disciplinary manner. Based on this finding, initiatives were developed in response, including a curriculum development proposal which was supported by colleagues from a range of departments. (**IMP10p90**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (IMP1) *Benchmarking in Pascal Universities and Regional Engagement: An overview of processes and outcomes*. Report from PURE project. Available at: <http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/forums/benchmarking/benchmarking-pure-overview-processes-and-outcomes> (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP2) *PASCAL Report to the Puglia Region: PURE Work 2009-2010*. Available at: <http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/library/pure/fr-puglia> (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP3) *PASCAL Report to the Region of Flanders: PURE Work 2009-2010*. Available at: <http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/library/pure/fr-flanders> accessed 24/09/13
- (IMP4) *PASCAL Report to the Gabarone Region: PURE Work 2009-2010*. Available at: http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/Final_Report-Gabarone.pdf (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP5) *PURE Briefing Paper No. 16, Benchmarking Universities in Regions, Some Thoughts Arising from Benchmarking in Melbourne PURE*. November 2009. Available at: <http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/library/pure/briefing-paper-16> (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP6) *PASCAL Report to the Melbourne Region: PURE Work 2009-2010*. Available at: <http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/library/pure/fr-melbourne> (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP7) Testimonial from Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Vice President, Victoria University
- (IMP8) *Implementing the Third Mission of Universities in Africa (ITMUA)*. Available at: <http://pascalobservatory.org/projects/current/implementing-third-mission-universities-africa-itmua> (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP9) *PASCAL Report to Lesotho: PURE Work 2009-2010*. Available at: http://pure.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/Final_Report-Lesotho.pdf (accessed 24/09/13).
- (IMP10) Preece, J. (2011). 'Higher education and community service: Developing the National University of Lesotho's third mission'. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 17:1, 81-97. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/JACE.17.1.7>.